

Message Text

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45

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 SSC-01 EB-11 AGR-20 USIE-00

AID-20 IGA-02 OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIEP-02 NSCE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 SAM-01 DRC-01 /142 W

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4662

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA PRIORITY

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 0485

E.O. 11652 - GDS

TAGS: PGOV, EAGR, ES

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT MOLINA CHANGES AGRICULTURE MINISTER &

SUB-SECRETARY

GUATEMALA FOR ROCAP; USCINCSO FOR POLAD

1. SUMMARY. IN A MOVE WHOSE SWIFTNESS AND SURPRISE IS BECOMING CHARACTERISTIC OF PRESIDENT MOLINA, THE RESIGNATIONS OF AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK MINISTER ROBERTO LLACH HILL AND UNDER-SECRETARY ANTONIO CABRALES WERE ACCEPTED AND A NEW TEAM SWORN IN LATE FEB 5. THE NEW MINISTER IS MUURICIO ELADIO CASTILLO AND THE UNDER-SECRETARY LT. COL. ROBERTO ESCOBAR GARCIA. BOTH HAVE SERVED AS PCN DEPUTIES AND THEIR POLITICAL CREDENTIALS MAY EXPLAIN PART OF THE REASON FOR THE CHANGE. WHILE WE CAN AS YET ONLY SPECULATE ON THE REASON FOR THE SHIFT, LLACH AND CABRALES HAD ATTEMPTED TO ESTABLISH A NON-POLITICAL STANCE WHICH MAY HAVE CLASHED WITH PERFORMANCES DESIRED BY MOLINA, ESPECIALLY DURING THE CURRENT POLITICAL CAMPAIGN WHEN FOOD COSTS HAVE BECOME AN OFF-REPEATED OPPOSITION ISSUE. THE
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ONLY PUBLICIZED REASON OFFERED BY THE OUTGOING TEAM FOR THE

RESIGNATIONS WAS "TO DEDICATE OURSELVES TO PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PURSUITS". FURTHER INTERPRETATION WILL BE REPORTED AFTER WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY DISCUSS THE MATTERS IN DETAIL WITH LLACH ISEEDLFRUY P DM

2. IN A SURPRISE MOVE REMINISCENT OF THE CABINET CHANGES OF OCTOBER 1973, FEB 6 NEWSPAPERS ANNOUNCED THE IRREVOCABLE RESIGNATIONS OF AGRICULTURE MINISTER LLACH AND HIS UNDER-SECRETARY CABRALES, M AFTER SERVING IN THEIR POSITIONS LESS THAN FOUR MONTHS. THE ONLY REASON GIVEN WAS THEIR DESIRE TO RETURN TO PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PURSUITS. SINCE DIRECT EMBASSY/AID CONTACTS WITH BOTH HAVE BEEN CLOSE AND CURRENT, AND SINCE THE TWO IN RECENT DAYS GAVE NO INDICATION THAT A CHANGE WAS IMMINENT, WE SUSPECT A LAST MINUTE DECISION ON THEIR PARTS AND RAPID ACTION BY MOLINA TO FILL THEIR POSITIONS. THUS FAR, WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO DISCUSS WITH THEM THEIR REASONS FOR RESIGNING.

3. AT THIS STAGE, WE CAN ONLY SPECULATE ABOUT THE CAUSE FOR THE SHIFT

, BUT THREE ISSUES COME TO MIND. THE INCREASED COST OF LIVING, PARTICULARLY IN BASIC GRAINS HAS BEEN PERHAPS THE NUMBER ONE ISSUE (ALTHOUGH NOT A REALLY BURNING ONE) IN THE CURRENT ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND REFLECTS THE MINISTRY'S POLICIES AND ACTIONS THROUGH THE GRAIN STABILIZATION AGENCY IRA. EITHER THE PRESIDENT'S UNHAPPINESS WITH THIS PERFORMANCE OR IMPATIENCE WITH PROGRESS IN IMPROVING IRA MAY HAVE LED TO A PARTING OF WAYS. THE SECOND POSSIBLE ISSUE IS RELATED TO THE FIRST. LLACH CONSIDERS HIMSELF ABOVE OR AT LEAST APART FROM POLITICS AND ON MANY OCCASIONS HAS SO STATED TO MCSSION OFFICERS. AS HIS ALTER EGO, CABRALES WOULD TAKE THE SAME STANCE. THEIR REACTION TO POSSIBLE PRESSURES FROM MOLINA TO ENGAGE ACTIVELY IN THE CURRENT ELECTION FORAY OVER PRICES, ETC., COULD HAVE CAUSED THEM TO RESIGN. THE THIRD REASON, AND LEAST CREDIBLE, IS REMOVAL OR RESIGNATION BY CABRALES BECAUSE HE WAS RECENTLY NAMED BY OPPOSITION PARTY FUDI, ALONG WITH OTHER PROMINENT PCN OFFICIALS, AS BENEFICIARIES OF PROPERTY IN THE GOES' ZAPOTITAN IRRIGATION PROJECT (SEE A-19). SINCE HE AND LLACH ARE SO INTIMATE, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTED THAT THEY WOULD MOVE TOGETHER WHATEVER THE REASON.

4. OUR VERY PRELIMINARY INTERPRETATION AS TO WHY CASTILLO AND
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ESCOBAR WERE CHOSEN IS THAT THEY HAVE GOOD POLITICAL CREDENTIALS. CASTILLO HAS AN ACTIVE AGRICULTURAL AND PUBLIC SERVICE BACKGROUND AND ESCOBAR MAY PROVIDE A RESPONSE TO LONG-KNOWN MILITARY CONCERNS OVER "WITHER AGRARIAN REFORM" AND THE FEELING AMONG SOME OFFICERS THAT THE MILITARY SHOULD BE SOMEWHAT MORE INVOLVED IN THE MECHANICS OF GOVERNMENT.

5. THE NEW MINISTER, MAURICIO ELADIO VASTILLO, AGE 47, IS A

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